

"CONFESSIONS OF A CIA INFORMANT"

News Watch/Continued BY MERRILL PANITT (Oct 2, 1971)

young newspaper or television reporter do if the CIA approached him with the same request that was made of me? Would he consider that if he cooperated he might some day be accused of betraying the pristine profession of journalism? Would he be concerned about having any association whatever with an agency that had been guilty of tapping phones and opening mail to check on Americans' contacts with foreign governments? Would he hesitate to be seen by his peers talking with a man from an agency that might have assisted in plots to overthrow foreign governments by fair means or foul?

You bet he would. By exuberantly seizing upon every morsel of information about CIA—and FBI—past excesses, the press and TV have given all too many of us the idea that those excesses were the chief, and possibly only, activity of the agencies. CIA and FBI are dirty words in our country today, with the legitimate and absolutely necessary functions of those agencies all but forgotten by the public and by journalists preoccupied with the notion that intelligence is synonymous with lawbreaking. Forgotten too is the fact that the major revelations of illegal CIA and FBI activities came chiefly from Congress and from the agencies themselves, proof that while our system can indeed slip on occasion, it can also recover its balance.

How do we counter the intelligence offensive of our potential enemies when they are not limited as our intelligence agencies are by considerations of Constitutional rights of privacy, a free press, and strong internal opposition to the very idea of secret operations? The obvious answer is "with difficulty."

Certainly we cannot adopt the totalitarian techniques employed by the Soviets, whose intelligence establishment is subject to neither parliamentary nor public scrutiny. Nor can we simply abandon efforts to gather intelligence and counter the covert activities of potential enemies, for that would be

scrapping our most important defense weapon.

No, much as most of us would like to live in an America where there was no need for an FBI or a CIA, that is not possible so long as we have criminals and foreign agents at home and vast intelligence networks abroad dedicated to undermining the West—and especially to undermining the United States.

All this is hardly news to any American and it shouldn't be necessary to say. Unfortunately, in today's media climate, it is. The FBI, despite what you have read in your newspapers and what you have seen and heard on television, is not the enemy. The CIA, despite what you have read in your newspapers and seen and heard on television, is not the enemy. They have erred and erred grievously. They have confessed, repented and taken steps to prevent illegal activities in the future. Congress has acted to prevent recurrence of past excesses.

Now, it would seem, would be the time to stop emphasizing the past and start restoring the ability of those agencies to function efficiently under their new ground rules. We know what has been wrong with them in the past.

Speaking as a former CIA "associate," I still don't see anything morally or journalistically wrong in a member of the press giving information or observations to the CIA on a one-time or even on a regular basis.

If an American correspondent has knowledge that might help his country, is he honor-bound to keep it from his country? Is he a journalist first and an American second?

Our priorities need some attention. Journalists certainly must continue to uncover injustice, malfeasance in office, social ills and other faults of our society and our government. They still, however, are citizens of this country, not a profession apart. And if they can personally be of service to their country, it is no journalistic crime to perform that service. (44)